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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000302

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DOE FOR CAROLYN GAY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/25/2018

TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SCUL](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: AMBASSADOR'S VISIT TO PORT HARCOURT

Classified By: Ambassador Robin R. Sanders for reasons 1.4. (b & d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: On January 29 the Ambassador traveled to Port Harcourt, Rivers State, on a mission to engage civil society NGOs, meet with political leadership, and highlight USG efforts in the Niger Delta region. First meeting with representatives from fifteen NGOs involved in USG-supported grassroots civil society efforts, she listened to their presentation on the difficulties they and their communities face working in the challenging Niger Delta security and development environment. The Ambassador then met with Rivers State Governor Rotimi Amaechi (People's Democratic Party). Fresh from meeting with Niger Delta youths at an educational conference, Governor Amaechi was confident that he could draw his state's young people back into their communities and away from militancy via a combination of vocational training and new educational methodologies. He also expressed appreciation for the way the Ambassador's visit brought attention to the improved security climate in Port Harcourt, and looked forward to greater USG involvement in the troubled area. The Ambassador wrapped up her visit to the city with a call on the Mission's American Corner, making a presentation commemorating the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. END SUMMARY.

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ENGAGING CIVIL SOCIETY  
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12. (C) On January 29, the Ambassador, accompanied by USAID Mission Director and the President and CEO of the International Foundation for Education and Self-Help (IFESH), met with leaders of fifteen USG-supported Delta State- and Rivers State-based NGOs. In a frank discussion on the difficulties they face in moving their agendas forward in their respective states, the leaders described a region whose development is hobbled by militancy and underdevelopment. Many of the youths drawn to militancy and criminality had no political aims, they said, but did so simply to earn money to pay school fees and to provide food for their families, engaging in such activity several times a month and then returning home. One way to combat the draw of the gangs was to find legitimate ways to use the skills the youths acquired in illicit activity -- e.g. having learned how to transport bunkered oil, they could then be trained to transport legal goods. Finding bitter irony in the fact that fuel oil in this oil-rich region costs six to seven times more than in nearby Lagos or far away Abuja, he emphasized that progress was possible by resolving injustice and giving youths a stake in the welfare of their communities. They expressed the hope

that civic education, information technology, and HIV/AIDS programs could replace the gun as the tools of choice to bring development and change to the Delta.

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ENGAGING POLITICAL LEADERSHIP  
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13. (C) The Ambassador next met with Rivers State Governor Rotimi Amaechi, who expressed great confidence that his programs could bring militant youths back into society's mainstream through vocational training and creative educational efforts. He praised the Ambassador's visit, as well as the pending visit of the Chief of the Norwegian Mission, as a way to showcase his State's improved security climate. (Comment: The Ambassador's visit to Port Harcourt was the first by a U.S. Chief of Mission in the last four years. End Comment.) The Ambassador admitted there had been a lack of USG presence in Rivers State and promised an assessment of how the Mission could be more involved, especially in the provision of oversight to projects already funded by the U.S. She noted the appearance in Port Harcourt of seemingly active, normal commercial and economic activities. Despite the apparent gains in law and order, however, she said she would need to see a longer period of calm prior to opening the door to more Mission personnel and engagement. She promised the Governor more regular communication with him, especially in the matter of security-related issues.

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ENGAGING CULTURE  
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14. (U) Finally, the Ambassador concluded her day with a visit to Port Harcourt's American Corner, which has been operating without direct American hire oversight for the past two years. There she gave remarks to forty people about the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and its relevance to both U.S. and Nigerian society today.  
SANDERS